

Edmond Clément

the
complete
Odéon
(1905)
and Victor
(1911~13)
recordings





Odéon, Paris

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| 1 | IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA: Ecco, ridente in cielo 'Cavatina' (Rossini) <i>Fr.</i>
1905; XP 2235 (Odéon 56003) | 3:21 |
| 2 | ROMÉO ET JULIETTE: Ah lève-toi soleil 'Cavatine' (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i>
1905; XP 2264 (Odéon 56000) | 3:34 |
| 3 | MANON: Ah fuyez, douce image 'Air de Saint-Sulpice' (Massenet) <i>Fr.</i>
1905; XP 2265 (Odéon 56001) | 3:25 |
| 4 | LA DAME BLANCHE: Ah, quel plaisir 'Grand Air' (Boïeldieu) <i>Fr.</i>
1905; XPh 758 (Odéon 56002) | 3:05 |
| 5 | MANON: En ferment les yeux 'Le rêve' (Massenet) <i>Fr.</i>
1905; XPh 759 (Odéon 56050) | 3:04 |

Victor Talking Machine Company, New Jersey

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| 6 | MANON: En ferment les yeux 'Le rêve' (Massenet) <i>Fr.</i>
6 xi 1911; C III191-I (Victor 74258) | 3:35 |
| 7 | Bergère légère (Werkerlin) <i>Fr.</i> | 1:19 |
| 8 | L'adieu du matin (Pessard) <i>Fr.</i>
6 xi 1911; B III185-I (Victor 64223) | 1:50 |
| 9 | Chanson lorraine (Arcadet) <i>Fr.</i>
6 xi 1911; B III186-I (Victor 64242) | 2:10 |
| 10 | Sonnet matinal (Massenet) <i>Fr.</i> | 2:05 |
| 11 | Il neige (Bemberg) <i>Fr.</i>
6 xi 1911; B III189-I (Victor 64294) | 1:17 |

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| 12 | Ça fait peur aux oiseaux (Bemberg) <i>Fr.</i>
6 xi 1911; B 11188-1 (Victor 64226) | 2:51 |
| 13 | LE ROI D'YS: Vainement ma bien-aimée 'Aubade' (Lalo) <i>Fr.</i>
18 xii 1911; C 11391-1 (Victor 74264) | 3:28 |
| 14 | JOCELYN: Oh! ne t'éveille pas encor 'Berceuse' (Godard) <i>Fr.</i>
18 xii 1911; B 11392-2 (Victor 64233) | 2:50 |
| 15 | WERTHER: Pourquoi me réveiller (Massenet) <i>Fr.</i>
18 xii 1911; B 11394-1 (Victor 64234) | 2:28 |
| 16 | Les Rameaux (Faure) <i>Fr.</i>
17 iii 1913; C 12999-2 (Victor 74319) | 3:33 |
| 17 | ROBERT LE DIABLE: Du rendez-vous (Meyerbeer) <i>Fr.</i>
with Marcel Journet, <i>bass</i>
18 i 1912; C 11468-1, C 11469-1 (Victor 76020, 76021) | 8:08 |
| 18 | LES PÊCHEURS DE PERLES: Au fond du temple saint (Bizet) <i>Fr.</i>
with Marcel Journet, <i>bass</i>
18 i 1912; C 11470-1 (Victor 76022) | 3:59 |
| 19 | ROMÉO ET JULIETTE: Ange adorable (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i>
with Geraldine Farrar, <i>soprano</i>
13 ii 1913; C 12912-1 (Victor 88421) | 4:25 |
| 20 | DANTE: Nous allons partir (Godard) <i>Fr.</i>
with Geraldine Farrar, <i>soprano</i>
13 ii 1913; B 12910-2 (Victor 87508) | 2:45 |
| 21 | MEFISTOFELE: Lontano, lontano (Boito) <i>It.</i>
with Geraldine Farrar, <i>soprano</i>
13 ii 1913; C 12913-2 (Victor 88422) | 3:18 |

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| 22 | Sous la fenêtre, op.34 no.1 (Schumann) <i>Fr.</i>
with Geraldine Farrar, <i>soprano</i>
17 iii 1913; B 12911-4 (Victor 87507) | 3:19 |
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| 23 | Au clair de la lune (Lully) <i>Fr.</i>
with Geraldine Farrar, <i>soprano</i>
17 iii 1913; B 12914-2 (Victor 87509) | 2:43 |

tracks 1 - 5 & 23 with piano; tracks 6 - 12 with Frank La Forge, piano; tracks 13 - 15 with orchestra; tracks 16 - 22 with orchestra conducted by Rosario Bourdon

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Fond of identifying certain types of voices with individual singers (e.g. the 'Dugazon', 'Falcon', 'baryton Martin'), the French might well have added to their listing a type of tenor called the 'Clément'. For one thing, unlike the other singers mentioned, he lived within the age of the gramophone record, so later generations would have a better understanding of what is meant. More importantly, he is a useful archetype, as good and pure an example of the French lyric tenor as any. As heard in his recordings, Clément's voice has no admixture of baritone or of heroic timbre, and he belongs unmistakably to the national school. To attempt a definition of that school would drive us to search for examples, and when it comes to the lyric-tenor Clément would almost certainly be the first to come to mind.

It might be objected that this argument is circular. We have a notion that French singing at its most characteristic is elegant and charming, with voices of a slender cut and with a well-mannered style; finding in Clément a singer who possesses just such qualities we say that he is 'typically French'. But perhaps there is something in it. What Pol Plançon was (and in the general estimate remains) among basses, Clément is among tenors - at

least as far as vocal style is concerned. There is a sense that here is one of those voices that goes with a certain fastidiousness of taste; the grosser displays of operatic emphasis and emotional indulgence will be foreign to his nature.

Clément was born on 28 March 1867. Baptised Frédéric-Jean Edmond, he went to school at Chartres where he sang in the cathedral choir. A love of music and singing must have prevailed over more cautious plans, for he left the polytechnic where he had been studying civil engineering to enter the Paris Conservatoire. Here he became a pupil of Victor Warot, formerly a leading tenor at the Monnaie in Brussels where he had sung the title rôle in the Belgian première of *Tannhäuser*. Clément won the *premier prix* and was promptly engaged by the Opéra-Comique. He made his début as Vincent in Gounod's *Mireille* on 29 November 1889, and remained with the company until 1910, returning from time to time as late as 1916 when he again sang the rôle which had launched his career as a young man of 22. Throughout this time he was careful not to stray far beyond the essentially lyrical repertoire. Probably the most strenuous rôle he undertook was that of Offenbach's Hoffmann which despite its association with

light opera is in fact exceptionally demanding. He was also a noted Don José in *Carmen*, a rôle with a strong dramatic element which, according to contemporary accounts, Clément by no means underplayed. In the modern Italian repertoire he sang Rodolfo and Pinkerton (both in French), and his rôles in Mozart were Tamino and Don Ottavio. He was Paris's first Fenton in *Falstaff* (in 1894) and repeated this at the New York Metropolitan under Toscanini in 1910. He specialized primarily in French opera, developing a large repertoire and singing in many premières including those of Bruneau's *L'attaque du moulin* and Saint-Saëns's *Phryné*, both at the Opéra-Comique in 1893.

Internationally, Clément's career flourished most actively in the United States. Although he appeared for only one season at the Metropolitan, he earned a distinguished place in that company's history. He sang Ange Pitou in Charles Lecocq's *La fille de Madame Angot* and Dominique in *L'attaque du moulin*,

both American premières. The title rôles in rare revivals of *Werther* and *Fra Diavolo* brought a larger number of performances. In addition to his Fenton, New Yorkers were able to hear his Des Grieux in *Manon* where according to the formidable W. J. Henderson he 'ravished

the ear with the infinite variety and significance of his nuances in the *Rêve*'. Years later in her autobiography, Geraldine Farrar recalled her rôle as 'the placid Charlotte to the romantic Werther of Edmond Clément'; she also described him as 'an artist of the most exquisite taste and dramatic elegance', a compliment that is probably as eloquent as any.

Werther, Des Grieux and Don José were also rôles



Clément as Werther

Clément sang with the Boston Opera Company. Accounts of him during this period suggest that while his singing was duly admired it was his stage appearance, or rather the totality of his performances, that most impressed. As Werther he 'stirred the gentle emotions...with curly blond locks, a full,

melancholy face, a sorrowful and sentimental glance; ruffles at his wrists, his flowing tie and sugarloaf hat the very essence of poetic dress', and, again quoting from Quaintance Eaton's history of the company, his Hoffmann was marked by 'grace and elegance, a masculinity yet a dreaminess that accorded well with the poet's sudden changes from introspective melancholy to flaring action'. In *Carmen* he found the Spaniard Maria Gay too rough, and refused to sing with her again whereupon he was presented with the ageing Emma Calvé. She was perhaps more gentle than her predecessor, though by this time it appears that she was a terror with the conductor.

This brings Clément's career up to 1913, a year in which he toured the U.S. and Canada, returning to France upon the outbreak of war. Presumably, at the age of 47 he could have avoided military service had he chosen to; however, he volunteered and was wounded. Afterwards he sang in concerts for the troops and devoted

himself increasingly to teaching. Late in 1921 he gave a recital in New York's Aeolian Hall, the decline in his vocal resources being compensated by the undiminished finesse of his style. He continued to sing in Paris; Max de Schauensee, the revered authority on singing, reported on a voice not greatly touched by time even at the age of 60, and on a reception which was touchingly enthusiastic. Clément died three months later on 23 February 1928.

Clément's time in London is puzzling; his appearances there are well known because they were described by George Bernard Shaw in his *Music in London*. On 25 July 1894 Shaw was in high spirits celebrating 'the crowd of concerts and

recitals which have been devastating my afternoons for weeks past'. One of these occasions took place in a newly opened hall in Great Marlborough Street. The excessive resonance of the place was one cause of vexation; another was provided by the windows which Shaw had hoped Clément



Clément as Don José

might break 'with one of those strident notes of which he is so proud'. Apparently he did his best but the glass was too thick. Frustrated of the desired outcome, Shaw turned his attention to the singer (whom he had heard previously that season at St. James's). He asks if 'the English people have built up their nation through the centuries only to sit down now and hear a young man yell at the top of his voice'. It might do for the Opéra-Comique, he said, or for Australians, but it was not acceptable 'in the true artistic centre of London'. He had no doubt that 'Clément could sing very nicely if he wanted to; but, like most tenors, he doesn't want to. That is why great tenors are so rare, although good voices are so plentiful.'

It may have been essentially a freak of the acoustics; or perhaps Clément (only a year away from his prize-winning days at the Conservatoire) lacked the experience to gauge the amount of voice needed in an unfamiliar building. Possibly, with the impetuosity of

youth, he was simply proud of his fresh, resonant voice and thought Londoners might rejoice in it as did his fellow Parisians. Conceivably the influence of his teacher, a Wagnerian tenor, was still at work. Whatever the explanation, Shaw's account is oddly at variance with the impression we gain through Clément's recordings.

These include a most sensitive and accomplished performance of Count Almaviva's first aria in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Exquisitely embellished in the tradition documented by Garcia, it has scales of exceptional clarity and fluency as well as the grace of some finely turned trills. This is one of Clément's earliest records, and it enables us to hear the



Clément as Des Grieux

voice and art equally well-matched. Later, in the series made for the Victor Company in the U.S., there is still a most elegant sense of line, and indeed the later performance of Des Grieux's Dream Song from *Manon* is better than the first, more poetic in feeling and closer to the 'infinite variety' described by

Henderson. His duets with Farrar and the fine bass Marcel Journet suggest how Clément's compactness of tone would help it carry in combination with other voices. The café song *Ça fait peur aux oiseaux* has a delicious flavour of Paris, and there are the early songs *Bergère légère* and *L'adieu du matin*, both of them magical in the singer's handling of the melody and use of the head voice. There may even be one of the songs he sang ('yelled') to Shaw in the course of his first London concert (which was with Melba and Plançon), and which devoted a

large (and in Shaw's view disproportionate) part of the programme to pieces by Herman Bemberg. If at that concert he sang *La neige* as he sings it on record (one of a remarkable day's work in 1911 when seven songs were recorded, gems every one) then, far from threatening to break windows and devastate the gentle critic's afternoon, Clément would have amply demonstrated the phenomenon which Shaw described as a rarity: that of a singer with a good voice who is also a great tenor and an artist.

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